

# SCIENCE

# And Technology Program



## Management Practice Study II - County Land Use Impacts on Irrigation Districts

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The project is investigating successful and unsuccessful policies and planning tools that county governments currently use to prevent urban sprawl onto irrigated lands, particularly those irrigated lands developed through Reclamation projects. Increased environmental remediation needs, the increased need of water in urban areas, a doubling of the general population every 50 years, and the need to maintain production of good quality food for the future population all pose severe challenges to Reclamation's project areas. County land use policies and practices are believed to be at the core of problems facing irrigation districts today, particularly in their ability to operate effectively and maintain their original purpose.

To conduct focus group interviews with the county commissioners of 36 key irrigation counties in the Rocky Mountain region, one of the regions in the West experiencing very rapid urbanization of irrigated lands. Focus group interviews are planned for five counties in the first year. In addition, background information is being collected on irrigation districts as part of the baseline data collection effort to measure the effect of county government land use policies. Some of this background information is presently viewable at the following website: <http://socaddr244.soc.colostate.edu/>

The research is expected to generate a thorough review of county government policies and programs in the selected irrigation counties. Additional data on irrigation enterprise operational costs, rates of investment by irrigators in the capitalization of their farms, and county demographics will be used to measure the effectiveness of county government initiatives (or lack thereof) in controlling urban sprawl onto irrigation district lands.

The key partners in the study are water conservation coordinators in Reclamation area offices. These coordinators are expected to assist the research in setting up focus group sessions and in advising the research team about local county government issues.

Wilkins-Wells, John, and Thayne Coulter. 1999. The Effect of Urbanization on the Cost of Operating an Irrigation District or Canal Company. In Contemporary Challenges for Irrigation and Drainage, U.S. Committee on Irrigation and Drainage.